

Activists say Côte St. Luc herbicides use is off-track

Housefather says no action can be taken to stop spraying

By **MARTIN C. BARRY**

The Chronicle

Environmental activists are sounding the alarm over the use of herbicides by Canada's railways to keep train tracks free of weeds in Côte St. Luc where rail traffic is an everyday fact of life.

Answering questions in Côte St. Luc city council last month from Jack Cabot of Kingsley Avenue and Avrum Shtern of Baily Road, Mayor Anthony Housefather said there is virtually no action that can be taken locally because the railways' activities are confined to closed-off areas regulated by the federal government.

"Perhaps you can convince them to notify at least those people who live along the railway when they're going to spray so people living along the railway can take precautions, close their windows or even not be in the backyard?" said Shtern, whose own rear yard is adjacent to the main rail line that passes through Côte St. Luc.

Although he acknowledged that many substances today "could potentially cause damage or cancer," Housefather told Shtern, "While I very much appreciate the desire for strict use of herbicides and pesticides, in this case my understanding from the railway ... is we're speaking of a very limited area." He said that beyond asking the railways to publicly announce when they are applying herbicides, "I don't think that we have very much that we can do here."

Cabot claimed, "The railroads are hiding behind the skirts of the federal government. They are poisoning the country. The whole country, not only Côte St. Luc. Montreal and everywhere else ... What I would like to hear tonight is that some action will be taken to stop the railroads. I know we can't do it this summer, but for future summers. And we should be doing that as quickly as we can."

Housefather told Cabot, "In terms of the



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Côte St. Luc environment activists Jack Cabot and Avrum Shtern are concerned about chemicals used by the railways to keep tracks clear of vegetation.

CP tracks, they are spraying in a very limited radius around the tracks. The railroads ... are not regulated in certain respects by municipal bylaws. They are a federally-chartered entity."

Regarding interventions on railway issues made to the federal government by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (of which Côte St. Luc is a member), Housefather said Côte St. Luc might submit a proposition to the FCM next year, seeking an amendment to Canada's railway regulation policy.

"My understanding is that their policy is asking the federal government to amend the railway act to allow municipal bylaws to predominate in areas that municipalities are responsible for," he said. "There's nothing about the policy itself that needs to be changed in order to comply with what you're asking."

"The real question is whether the federal government will do it," he added. "And for the federal government to do it, the lobbying of the municipality is not the right place. It has to be lobbying of the federal government. And the person to speak to in this area is Irwin Cotler who's the federal member of Parliament — not to local Côte St. Luc council."